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ABSTRACT

This paper describes research that was conducted in three phases between 1989-1990 to develop a 3-month early reading program for the use of day care centers in urban poor communities. The research meant to promote early literacy skills in a manner relevant to the children by using language with which they are comfortable and materials that are suited to their economic situation. At the same time, this research sought to contribute to the broadening scope of alternative education which has largely been limited to adult literacy and skills training. The background of the particular educational problems in the Philippines connected to the situation of women, children, and urban poverty is discussed. Also, the history and trends of preschool education in the Philippines and early literacy for the Filipino child are discussed. The paper then details the study's needs assessment; development of the early reading program (a holistic, literature-based approach to the teaching of reading and language); and implementation of the 3-month program in two day care centers (one served as control, the other as the experimental group). The paper relates that the children who underwent the early reading program exhibited significant gains in more areas of early literacy than the control group, which used a regular day care program. Includes three figures and a table of data; contains 18 references. (NKA)

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DEVELOPMENT OF AN EARLY READING PROGRAM FOR DAY CARE CENTERS IN URBAN POOR COMMUNITIES IN THE PHILIPPINES

ED 421 693

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| Introduction | What is Urban Poverty in the Philippine Context? | Women, Children and Urban Poverty | Preschool Education in the Philippines: History and Trends | Early Literacy for the Filipino Child | Language and Reading | The Research Problem And Hypotheses | Development and Validation of the Early Reading Program | Results and Recommendations | Bibliography |

INTRODUCTION

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This research was conducted in three phases between 1989 to 1990. Its objectives were to develop a three---month early reading program for the use of day care centers in urban poor communities. It aimed to respond to the expressed needs regarding early childhood education as articulated by urban poor leaders. It meant to promote early literacy skills in a manner that is relevant to the children by using the language they are comfortable with and through materials that are suited to their economic situation. At the same time, this research sought to contribute to the broadening scope of alternative education which has largely been limited to adult literacy and skills training.

WHAT IS URBAN POVERTY IN THE PHILIPPINE CONTEXT?

The Philippine population as of 1988 is sixty million with a yearly increment of 2.5% per year. As a result of this steep rate in population growth, poverty is manifest: squatter colonies proliferate within and near urban centers; street children densely populate the dangerous traffic thoroughfares and highways; communicable and curable diseases continue to take lives; hundreds of children drop out of school each year. Many children from both rural and urban communities are unable to study beyond fourth grade in the primary school.

According to the National Statistical Coordination Board, the 1994 poverty threshold for Metro Manila was P 11,312 . More than fifty percent of Filipino families live below the poverty line while only the top 10% of the entire population shared in the 35.7% of the 1988 national income. Statistics from the Presidential Commission on the Urban Poor indicate that 30% of the population of the National Capital Region lived in only 5.3% of its total land area. This suggests that a large percentage of Metro Manila's population do not own the land on which their homes stand. Families tend to share dwellings, resulting in an average of twelve persons to a house.

WOMEN, CHILDREN AND URBAN POVERTY

Metro Manila has a higher proportion of unemployed as compared to the rest of the country. The reason is the National Capital Region is the center of most economic activities of the country and is therefore seen by many in the rural areas as the venue of opportunity. Thus, migration from rural areas to Metro Manila is prevalent. The labor force of Metro Manila includes over one million women, at least 70% of them of child bearing age (David and Angangco, 1975: 21). Given the fact that the responsibilities of child rearing and household management rest almost entirely on the mother, women accept their added role of wage---earner with the pride of a martyr. Many of them take on jobs as laundry or cleaning women, and other blue collar jobs. They share ambivalent feelings regarding their multiple roles and express guilt feelings because the think they neglect their homes, children and husbands (Dionela, 1989:12).

Though Philippine society has an extended family structure, most urban poor mothers do not enjoy the assistance of their relatives in child rearing because most of them also work. Furthermore, the problem of surviving in economically difficult times has hastened the breakdown of the extended family system in urban poor communities. Thus, children are neglected and unsupervised while their mothers are at work.

The need for organized day care services has been echoed repeatedly for many years. But given the budgetary limitations of the government, whole day child care service is not available. The most the government offers is a pre-school type of service where children stay in the center for at most 4 hours a day. As operationalized by the government's Department of Social Welfare and Development, day care service actually means nursery or kindergarten school. Such an arrangement doesn't really allow a mother to work, it merely gives her time to do her chores, care for younger children and perhaps get some rest.

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES: HISTORY AND TRENDS

The history of early childhood education in the Philippines is reflective of the colonizer's view of the child. The Spanish colonizers exerted all efforts to keep the Filipinos uneducated. The Americans tried to establish a public school system but in the process also introduced a new language. As a result, it was only a few years after our country's liberation from the Japanese Imperial Army in the 1950s that the public school system and other government agencies intensified their involvement in preschool education.

At the same time, global initiatives were taking place. The Republic of the Philippines is one of the signatories in the Convention of the Rights of the Child. The Philippine Constitution states that education should always be given priority.

The Barangay Day Care Law (Presidential Decree 1567 of 1978) dictates that a day care center should be established and maintained in every barangay with at least 100 families. The lead government agency responsible for early child care and education services is the Department of Social Welfare and Development. This agency has developed the day care program which puts its thrust towards values formation, and socialization for children aged 3 to 6 years old.

In the last two decades, preschool education has become a booming and lucrative business in the Philippines. Awareness of the value of early childhood education has led parents to apportion part of their earnings for their children's pre-school education. The cost of sending a young child to school can range from as low as fifty pesos to as much as seven thousand pesos a month.

In a study conducted by Natividad Santos in 1990, it was found that schools follow any of these five curriculum models : 1) subject-matter oriented models (71%); 2) child oriented models (16%); 3) school specific curriculum models (3%); 4) eclectic curriculum models (9%); and 5) religion oriented curriculum models (1%). She also found that though most preschools state objectives from the humanist perspective, most of their activities and programs show that mastery of subject matter still dominates the daily plan of activities. In another study, two general classifications of day care centers are presented. Government has a very extensive network of day care centers which offer very uneven services ranging from purely feeding centers to preschools with full time teachers and complete classroom facilities. Non-governmental organizations also organize early childhood education and care services as part of their projects in community organizing.

EARLY LITERACY FOR THE FILIPINO CHILD

Reading is the arrival at meaning from a printed page through a variety of clues --- grapho---phonological (knowledge of sound-symbols relationships), semantic (knowledge of words), syntactic (knowledge of language structures), schematic (prior knowledge about the world). For young learners, reading generally begins with the preparations needed for learning to read. There are many skills that a child at five or six years old must hone to be able to read. These skills are generally referred to as early literacy behaviors. As outlined by Strickland and Morrow (1989), these are:

1. physical maturity and readiness
2. knowledge of language structures
3. experiential/schematic background
4. motivation to learn to read
5. reading readiness skills
6. recognition of the sound symbol relationship
7. linguistic background
8. enjoyment of the activity of reading.

There are three basic factors that interact in learning to read: 1) experience; 2) oral symbols or language; and 3) printed symbols. The experiential background of the would---be reader is rooted on the child's perceptions of the world. All this is brought into the reading situation so that the first six years of life is actually crucial to the building of concepts and vocabulary which the young child carries on to the reading situation. The breadth and depth of experiences or concepts stored in a child's schema eventually acquires labels. These ideas slowly become crystallized as they become associated with a set of oral symbols called language (Kirkland: 1878). At this time, the child also begins to associate some symbols common in the environment with ideas he has. Slowly, the child begins to realize that the world has been named and labeled.

Between the ages of five and seven, most children are ready to learn the rudiments of reading and writing. They are formally and systematically introduced to a new set of symbols: print. A print rich environment reminds the child that written symbols have imbedded meanings to be discovered.

The diagram below illustrates this:

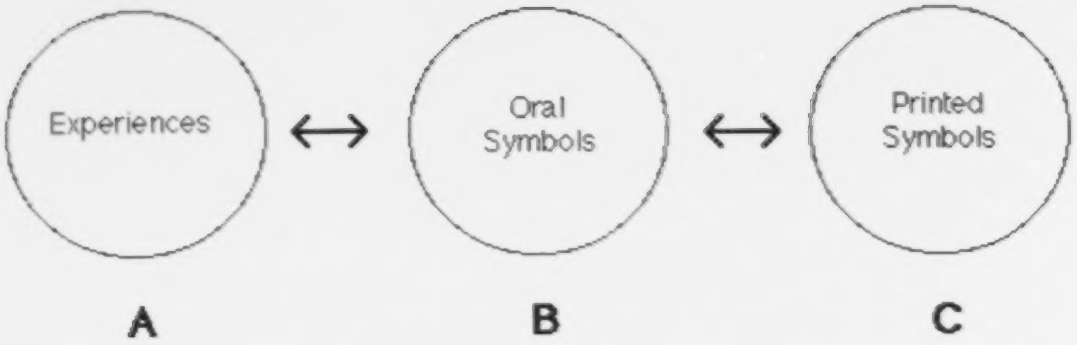


Figure 1. (Relationship of meaningful experiences / knowledge, oral language and printed language, Department of Reading, University of the Philippines)

LANGUAGE AND READING

The figure above shows a lateral relationship among the three factors because the printed symbols learned are based on the spoken language of the learner. However, this does not reflect the actual Philippine situation. Filipinos are a multi---lingual people who have a wealth of over seven hundred major and minor languages. Our youngest citizens are born and reared speaking in different dialects; giving different labels to common experiences. Our colonial past has left us confused and in discord where the language issue is concerned. There is much dispute about our national language. In our schools, three languages are spoken: the native language (which is variable), Filipino (the evolving national language which many can understand aurally), and English (the foreign language used as medium of instruction for science and mathematics). Children from all over the country learn their native language (the vernacular) very well. Filipino, they learn as they are exposed to media and in school. However, for English, they have inadequate models from which they can learn the language. Thus the figure below better reflects the actual relationship of spoken and printed language in our country.

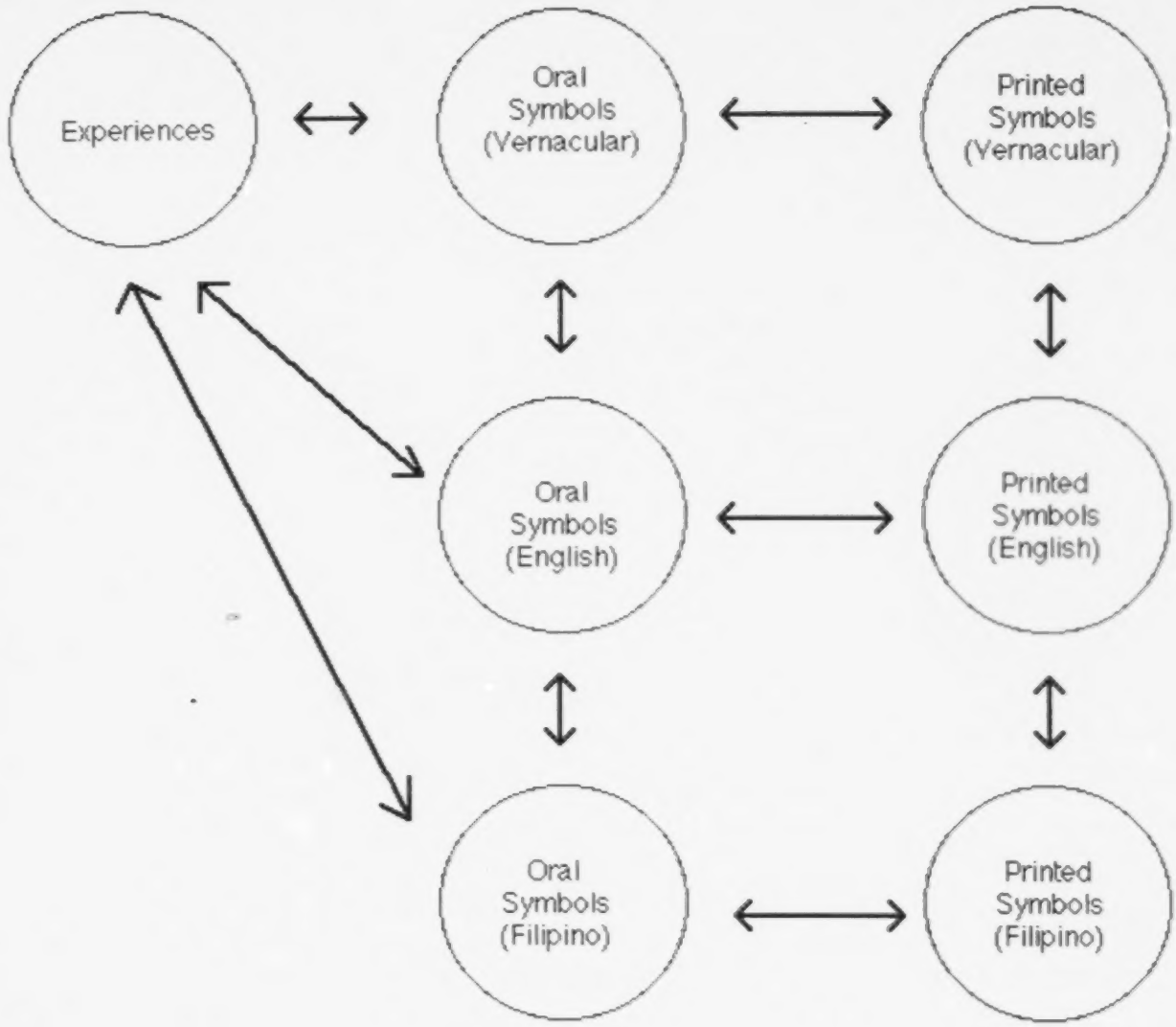


Figure 2. (Relationship of experiences/knowledge, oral language and printed language for Multi-Lingual Learners; adapted from Figure 1)

Reading instruction builds upon oral language. A child's success in reading is partly dependent on his or her mastery of the language in which he or she will learn to read. If a child's mastery of the oral language is weak, progress in reading will be slow and difficult. Young children at about six years old are ready to learn to read because they have fulfilled one of the pre---requisites for learning to read: an almost adult mastery of their language (Gudschinsky, 1979). However, given the limited exposure and inadequate models of Filipino and English, this can only true if they use their native oral language as basis for learning to read. Thus it can be concluded that if a child has poor mastery of the language of instruction used in schools, his or her learning will be adversely affected.

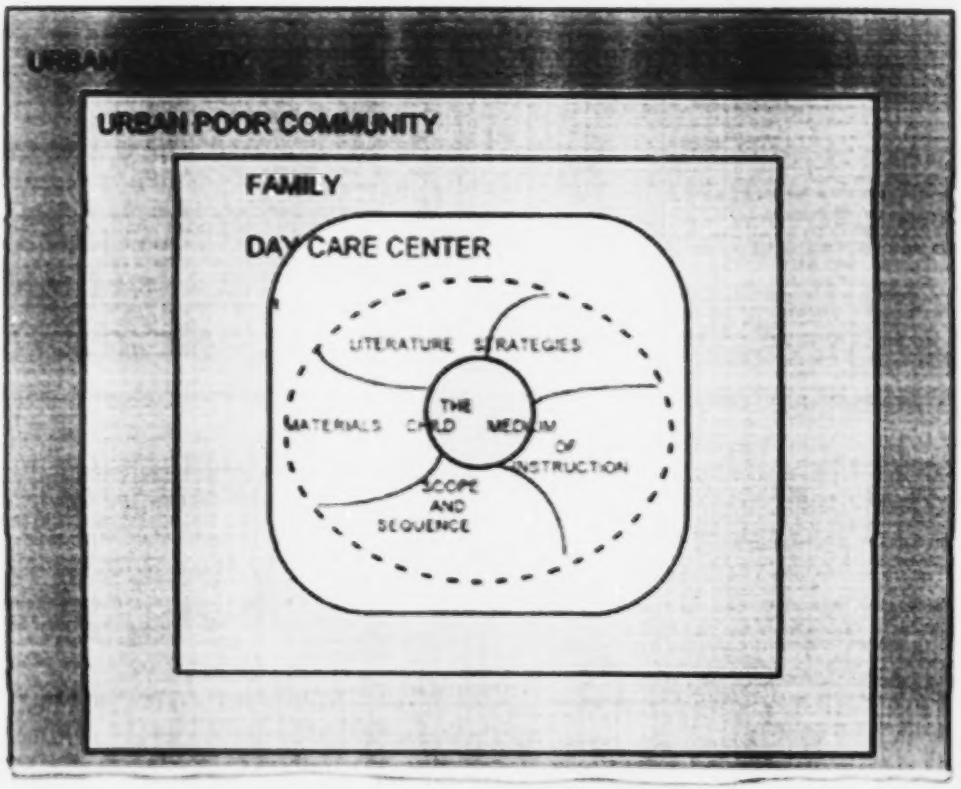
The 1948 experiment of Jose V. Aguilar conducted on entering Grade I pupils sought to prove the hypothesis that learning would improve in the primary schools if the vernacular were used exclusively in the first and second grades and if English were introduced only in the third grade. After one year, this study showed that students taught in their native tongue, Hiligaynon, were superior to pupils taught in English, particularly in mathematics. Two years later, when both groups were using English as medium of instruction for all subjects, the children who learned in the vernacular

caught up with the control group in the knowledge of English within six months of being exposed to the language (Harris, 1979).

The preschool child growing up in the midst of urban poverty need not be enslaved by destitution, illiteracy and an alien tongue that inhibits learning. To give them a psychologically and pedagogically sound head start will bridge their individual learning gaps. Learning to read in their first language will lessen the cultural and developmental disparity between the children who grew up with needs sufficiently satisfied and those who are disadvantaged.

The conceptual model that follows depicts the child as part of greater social settings which are urban poverty, the urban poor community, the family and the day care center. As the main actor in the proposed reading program, the child is exposed to materials, literature, strategies and a language of instruction that is natural. This early reading program attempted to prove that the day care center for children in urban poor communities can go beyond its custodial function. The time spent in the day care center should be used dynamically despite the lack of standard preschool materials and amenities.

Figure 3: A Conceptual Diagram



THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND HYPOTHESES

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In the light of these circumstances and objectives, the following questions were asked in the three phases of the study:

PHASE I: NEEDS ASSESSMENT
1. What is the literacy level of the children in the day care centers?
2. What do parents perceive as priority areas of instruction?
3. What language do parents prefer as medium of instruction in the day care centers? What are their reasons?

PHASE II: DEVELOPMENT OF THE EARLY READING PROGRAM:
1. What are the priority areas of reading instruction for children studying in day care centers in urban poor communities?
2. What affordable and feasible materials and strategies for reading readiness and beginning reading can be used in a day care center in urban poor communities?

PHASE III: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EARLY READING PROGRAM:
1. Which group of children will have higher literacy levels after three months?
2. What are the implications of this study on the training of day care workers?

This research operated on the basis of the following assumptions: 1) Urban poor children have very little background knowledge about books, and stories; 2) They communicate better in the vernacular than in English; 3) The children enjoy story reading, art and writing activities very much; 4) The children will benefit from concrete experiences and worksheet exercises more than copying exercises from the blackboard; and, 5) The children's readiness and interest in reading will improve after the implementation of the early reading program.

Also taken into account were the limitations such as the brief period allotted for the validation of the program. Another constraint was the emergence on non-comparable groups for the quasi-experimental design. The reason for this can be traced to the practice of accepting students as they came. Class size is not regulated in an urban poor day care center because the teachers' salary is taken from the fees paid by the students. The more students enrolled meant more income for the teacher. It would have been very insensitive and unfair to the teachers involved in this study to limit the number of children they will accept. In effect, the researcher employed within group comparisons.

In the succeeding sections, the use of the following terms are limited to the definitions stated below.

1. Early literacy - the behavior and skills required for learning to read. Book orientation, readiness skills, beginning reading and writing and oral language development are the areas of early literacy included in this paper.

2. Early reading program - the proposed program which aims to enhance the early literacy behaviors and skills of the preschool child.

3. Reading readiness test - the instruments developed, validated and used to measure the literacy levels of children from urban poor communities.

4. Literacy level - the score of the preschool children on the readiness test developed and validated for this paper.

The research hypotheses of this study were as follows:

1. The parents will identify reading and mathematics as priority areas for the day care program.
2. The children will exhibit minimal readiness for reading because their exposure to print and stories is limited.
3. There will be a more significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test of the children who would undergo the proposed early reading program than the mean score of the pre-test and post-test of the children in the control group.

DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF THE EARLY READING PROGRAM

PHASE I: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Two instruments were developed in order to gather baseline data for the next two parts of the study. Both were tried out, refined and validated.

The parent's questionnaire aimed to determine the perceptions and ideas of parents in urban poor communities about day care centers. A total of 156 individuals living in 6 urban poor communities responded. All were female except for fifteen. The respondents had varied levels of educational attainment ranging from no schooling at all to having a college degree or vocational training. The greatest number, however, did not graduate from elementary school. Most of the respondents and their spouses did not have regular employment. Average monthly income was P 1,380.00 for a household of 6-7 members. The answers to the questions were counted to establish the more frequently chosen options. Ninety-nine percent of the respondents stated that they would enroll their child in a day care center so that they would learn literacy and numeracy. They also said that they want their children to be taught to pray and understand the words of God, and to learn good behavior. Parents felt that the day care program should prepare children for Grade One. Those who said they wouldn't send their child to a day care center cited inaccessibility to a center and lack of money as their justification. They said that they just tried to teach their children at home.

Sixty percent of the respondents indicated that they prefer Filipino (or the vernacular) as the medium of instruction because the children understood it well and because it is our national language. On the other hand, 14% said that only English should be used because this was the language used in school. The rest felt that both languages should be used because children should not appear stupid whenever a foreigner is around.

The reading readiness test was constructed to gather baseline data on the early literacy levels of children without prior school experience. After its validation, this same test was used as pre-test and post-test for the third phase of the study. A total of 100 children aged 5-6 years old were given the field version of the test. The areas assessed by the instrument were visual perception, auditory perception, language, motor and knowledge of the alphabet and sounds. Initial plans were for small group administration but this proved futile. Most of the children did not even know how to hold a pencil. Individual assessment was thus employed.

The children in this sample have well developed auditory perception skills. However, most children scored poorly in the other areas.

The field version of the reading readiness test was subjected to item analysis so that it may be better refined as an instrument for the third phase of the study. Of the fifty-five items, twenty-five did not need revision while fifteen were revised. Five new items were created so that each area would have an item to assess it. The final version of the reading readiness test had a total of forty-five items spread across the five areas being assessed.

PHASE II: DEVELOPMENT OF THE EARLY READING PROGRAM

The program design of the early reading program followed the child--oriented curriculum model. The following guidelines were used : 1) The child is part within the context of his/her social milieu; 2) The child brings strengths in the learning situations; 3) The child has certain weaknesses and limitations which should be addressed; and, 4) The curriculum model should give importance to the needs of the child.

The priority areas of instruction generated by the parents' questionnaire and field assessment led these general features of the program design: 1) The medium of instruction used was Filipino (the vernacular in Metro Manila; 2) Listening comprehension was highest priority. A story or poem was read to them everyday and a post--reading activity such as discussion and aesthetic response is done. It was also through these stories that values education, science and, social studies became integrated with the program.

A scope and sequence of skills was prepared for the teacher so that she may keep track of the lessons the children were learning. This also helped her in assessing the children's performance after three months.

The early reading program followed the framework developed by Professor Basilisa Manhit. An adaptation of the Four-Pronged Approach was evolved in the course of the study. The Four-pronged Approach is a holistic, literature-based approach to the teaching of reading and language. The components are: 1) developing a genuine love for reading; 2) developing critical thinking; 3) mastery of oral language structures; and, 4) beginning reading. For the fourth prong, reading readiness skills were taught followed by the sequence of teaching phonics suggested in a decoding program called the Marungko Technique.

A pilot try-out of the early reading program was implemented by the researcher herself for two months in an urban poor community in Quezon City. For eighteen days, twenty-three children participated in the daily two hour sessions. The try-out resulted in affirming the assumptions made at the beginning of the research regarding the children's love for stories. It also provided insight regarding the time allotment for each activity, the format of the worksheets, and classroom management.

PHASE III: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE THREE-MONTH EARLY READING PROGRAM

The quasi-experimental research design was used in this phase of the study. Two day care centers, assisted by the same community organizing non-government organization were chosen. The day care center for the experimental group was located in Constitution Hills, Quezon City. The control group studied in the Welfareville day care center in Mandaluyong. Both were situated in an urban poor community, and any child between five and six years old was accepted. The teacher of the experimental group was provided lessons plans, materials, books to use, and weekly feedback. The other teacher was asked to implement her usual program.

All the children in the sample were five to six years olds who had not had previous school experience. The experimental group had an enrollment of forty-six children though only thirty-eight had taken the pre-test. This thirty-eight children will be referred to as the independent sample from here on. Their mean score on the reading readiness test was 24.47 with a standard deviation of 6.08. However, at the end of three-months, only thirty children had taken both the pre--test and the post--test. They shall be called the related sample. Their mean score was 25.43 with a standard deviation of 5.48.

On the other hand, the control group had a class size of forty-five. Only thirty-eight children were given the pre-test. This independent sample had a mean score of 20.05 with a standard deviation of 6.45. Thirty children of the independent sample were able to take the post-test. The related sample of the control group had a mean score of 20.53 with a standard deviation of 6.32 on the reading readiness test.

The researcher could not control the attendance and drop-out rate of the children included in the research. In effect, self-selection of the sample occurred. It was purely by chance that an equal number of children for both independent and related samples was reached.

To compare the means of the scores of the experimental and control groups, the t-test was used. However, since the pre-test scores of the two groups showed significant differences with the experimental group having a higher mean than the control group, the t-test was done to compare the means of scores within the groups instead of between groups. In this manner, the gains of each group were focused on and analyzed while the flaws in sample selection and composition were remedied.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From this point onward, only the related samples will be referred to. This study hypothesized that the children in the experimental group would yield higher scores on the post--test than the control group. Early on in the research, it was established that the difference in the mean scores of the independent and related samples of each group were insignificant. Based on this, the study was continued.

The results of the analysis of pre-test and post-test scores confirmed the hypothesis because the experimental group showed considerably greater gains in mean scores than the control group. The t-test of significance of difference in the

pre-test and post-test of the overall scores of the experimental group indicated significant gains at the .001 degree of probability in visual perception, motor and language skills, and knowledge of the alphabet and sounds. The gains in auditory perception were not very significant. The table below shows the summary.

Table 1: t-test of Significance of Difference Between Means of Total Scores in the Pre-Test and Post-Test of Experimental and Control Groups

Groups	Means		Difference between Means	*t-ratio*
	Pre-Test	Post-Test		
Experimental Group	25.43	36.63	11.20	7.77**
Control Group	20.53	22.30	1.77	1.05

* significant at .05
** significant at .001
not significant

More detailed analysis showed that even in the area and sub-area scores, the experimental group gained much more than the control group. The only area wherein the t-ratio was negligible was in the auditory discrimination sub-area. The control group on the other hand, hardly showed any significant gains in the five areas of the reading readiness test. It was only in the motor area that the children registered significant improvement.

To summarize, it can be concluded that the children who underwent the proposed three-month early reading program exhibited significant gains in more areas of early literacy than the control group which used its regular day care program. At the end of three months, the children in the experimental group proved that they had gained the pre-requisite reading readiness skills necessary for learning to read. In fact, many of them could read short passages.

These findings reflect that using Filipino or the vernacular as the medium of instruction in day care centers in urban poor communities has positive effects on the acquisition of early literacy in young Filipino children. Focusing on the most important aspects of early literacy, this study has shown that where reading is concerned, children living in urban poverty need not be disadvantaged because of the lack of expensive materials used in preschools.

Another insight that arose in this study in related to teacher training. Neither of the teachers involved in the study had a degree in child education. Yet the day care worker in the experimental group showed that she could facilitate learning by following lessons plans and using materials in the program design.

This study paves the way for more research regarding the language of instruction used in the schools and day care centers in the Philippines today. At the same time, there is a need to explore other alternative ways of advocating and providing early childhood education services to children who are economically and culturally marginalized.

Lastly, efforts should be made in the direction of adapting the proposed early reading program in more day care centers in both urban poor and rural communities. It should also be expanded to cover the whole school year. Government and non-government organizations should explore the possibility of replicating the proposed early reading program and monitoring how the children actually fare in the elementary grades.

The early literacy program developed in this study was designed and developed to address the special needs of day care centers and children from urban poor communities. It is not a cure-all potion for illiteracy nor simply a shot in the arm of a potentially educationally disadvantaged child. It is but a start in what could be a series of remedies rooted in the hope and strengthened by love for the Filipino child, language, and nation.

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